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SPEECH ON THE OCCASION OF THE ANNUAL PRIZE-GIVING HELD AT THE
MARAI'S VILJOEN TECHNICAL COLLEGE

WHAT HELLENISM HAS CONTRIBUTED TO SOUTH AFRICA

Mr. Mayor Councillor van Dyk, Mrs. van Dyk, Mr. Jonker, Mrs. Jonker,
Reverend Binnie, honoured guests.

In die eerste instansie wil ek graag my dank uitspreek vir die eer en voorreg wat aan my vrou en myself vanaand toegestaan is. Die is 'n eer om aan hierdie skool verbonde te wees en iets wat nie maklik in woorde gestel kan word nie. As another simple Christian human being, I have made it my task to associate myself with the welfare of schools and especially children - our new up-and-coming backbone of this country.

This school in particular ladies and gentlemen, has been one with which it has been a pleasure to be able to say "I know that school and I know that scholar's school". It is indeed a school whose history has shown, and I have no doubt its results will show in the future that it does more than its just duty in the education of our youth. Sincere congratulations to you Mr. Myburgh, and your staff, your controlling body and I say this from the deepest of my heart especially to your P.T.A. which I feel is always the pivot of any good school.

What Hellenism has contributed to South Africa - A very broad topic, but a very interesting one. I might add that a few days ago I had the privilege of partaking in a symposium at R.A.U. on a topic "What Greek Heritage means to me, and what it has done for South Africa". There is no doubt whatsoever that time will not allow a study in length and depth, but we will probably be able to look at a very broad picture this evening, which should give us a fair idea about the subject matter and very important, allow one to formulate one's own ideas. It is estimated that there are approximately 45 000 Greeks in the Republic of South Africa. "It is said that the first Greek settlers were eleven sailors who jumped ship at Port Elizabeth in 1880 and settled on an island farm. Their leader, nicknamed Cyclops, is said to have married his wealthy host's beautiful sister a Miss Erasmus. It is on record that there were a number of Greeks who partook in the Anglo Boer War. Here I might add that one of those was a direct great uncle of mine. It is officially stated that a great majority of the Greeks fought with the Boers during the war. It may interest us as Albertonians to know that the late Mr. Fitisilis is buried in the Alberton Cemetery, and that he was a prominent oudstryder. His medals are in our possession.

Today, Hellenism has organised itself into Greek Communities throughout the Republic of South Africa. They have, however, not created laagers or formed isolated islands of people within the Republic. They have fully assimilated into the South African way of life, they form an intricate part of South Africa, and the newer immigrants have accepted South Africa as their new home. These organised Communities allow for the retention of their heritage and culture, a factor that we all know is fully encouraged in South Africa - South Africa respects

and expects us to respect one another's entity.

They are all Christians of the Orthodox Faith. It will interest everybody to know that this is the oldest Christian Faith in existence and has been practised throughout the centuries in the same way. It is this common religious Faith, coupled with the richness of the Greek heritage, and which has been proven has been complimentary to the South African way of life, that in my opinion, has made it possible for Hellenism to form an intricate part of South Africa.

In my opinion, and I stress this is my view, I feel that South Africa has received two types of Greek immigrants or, at the moment, is faced with two sorts of Greeks. Up to the preimmigration era which I say started in 1965, we had mainly Greek immigrants who were not highly qualified in any respects. They were mainly men associated with the land. They were small time farmers and war conditions in Europe, especially in Greece, made them wish to seek their fortunes elsewhere, such as America, Australia and South Africa. Because of the association of South Africa with Greece during the war years, South Africa was a very attractive country and needless to say, South Africa always enjoyed a very high status in Greece. Its richness was wellknown and it was people would seek to lead a better life in South Africa. Remember that Europe was for a long time, poverty stricken.

This Greek is assimilated in South Africa and became part and parcel of the South African way of life and as I mentioned in my historical note, they even partook in the Boer War. They were originally miners and thereafter gradually with more immigrants coming in, they moved into commerce, such as the simple trading store, cafe, bakeries etc. These people today are enjoying fruits of their children born in South Africa, grand-children, great-grandchildren and even great-great-grandchildren. The children of these people have without hesitation, become fullyfledged South Africans. This is their country of birth. They have been born, bred, educated and married in South Africa. They know no other country. They, unlike their parents have had the opportunity to be educated in this rich country, such is the opportunity which we all have enjoyed - the opportunity that you children are enjoying at this highly respected school. I am one of those products. Today, the product of the original immigrants served South Africa in all walks of life, be it medical, legal, teaching, commerce, technical, scientific, higher education such as University Professors, Lectures, and I say without hesitation civil service and the South African Army. The products of these people enjoy a very high status and in short, they are no different from your mothers and fathers. These people in short, have really become a very hard core in the South African way of life, yet because of the nature of South Africa's makeup, they have been able to retain contacts with Greece, basically also really because of the historical nature of Greece which enables this contact to be retained. But it must be stressed, we do not serve two Gods.

We now come to what I would call the newer immigrants, that is those who were invited to come to South Africa during the past odd twenty years. These people could only come to South Africa if they were highly qualified - academically and technically. South Africa was in great need of highly skilled people and because of the history

of the existing Hellenic Communities in South Africa, there was no hesitation on the part of the authorities to campaign in Greece and obtain the benefit of these skilled people instead of letting them be lost to Australia, America, Germany and today the Middle East. This new South African, the new immigrant, that had arrived under different conditions, has obviously found himself in a new country in which he has had to adapt himself. The organised Communities that I mentioned earlier on, have assisted to a very large extent. He has left work in his country of birth, come here and offered us his or her skilled services at a better price. At a price which would enable him to lead a better life. Some have come under contract for a short period - a lot have chosen to stay with their contract period ending whilst others have chosen to go back. Like all of us, most have been able to adapt themselves - a lot have already made their impact on the South African scene because of their known academic and technical skills. Others have not made the grade and today with things being difficult, have had no alternative but to possibly seek return to their country of birth. By and large however, I am fully satisfied that the majority of the immigrants in the post era have adapted themselves in South Africa and they are also already in a position where their children are benefitting from what South Africa has to offer and they too are becoming fully fledged South Africans. In general terms boys and girls, ladies and gentlemen, Hellenism because of its rich heritage, has enabled it to be complimentary to the South African way of life. Let us remember that the main facets in the South African way of life also form the main points in the Hellenic way of life, namely religion, patriotism, family life, the love of nature etc.

In our every day life, the product of Hellenism has seen the creation of fairly big industrialists, bankers, commercial people, and academics, but something that touches the South African heart most I am certain when it comes to everyday life, is their love of nature, the land and last but not least, sport. They have made their mark in sport, but to mention a few - Xenophon Balaskas - in recent international cricket teams John Traicos. The boxing champion George Anslow, and of course on the wrestling scene protégés who are numerous to mention of Jim Londes. Even in most recent times, a few weeks ago, you have seen on T.V. the Springbok Brian Cockoris and rather uniquely because they are great soccer fans, the Northern Transvaal wing, Thomaidēs the great surfing champion Thomopoulos known as Thomas. I mention in the academic field the great works of Dr. Philip Ecolides who has recently completed a Greek Afrikaans grammar. This is presently being distributed. A very notable thing is that there are a lot of Greek students at the Pretoria Afrikaans University, students who do not master either of the two official languages in South Africa but yet they have become adjutants in Afrikaans. I have to mention something that we all pride ourselves with, every South African, that we have the potato king Lampies Nichas - a man who has adopted South Africa as his homeland and who serves South Africa on a broad basis, as we all know the famous Monday Club in London is very well served by him and he is the only exposed member. With regard to his potato industry, let it be noted that America has tried to overrun his vastness by trying to organise farmers to outstrip him but this has not been made possible and let it be noted that all the African states around us look to his potatoes for food.

As I said, time does not allow a very detailed talk on this topic, but I do feel that I have managed to present a very light general coverage of what Hellenism has contributed to South Africa.